

By Yeshwanth Kandimalla

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK A new water reclamation project will provide up to 40 million gallons a day of treated wastewater to use on landscaping.

Local officials marked the completion of the first phase of the Jordan Lake Reclamation and Reuse Project on Tuesday by turning a valve for sprinklers jetting reclaimed water. A 4.4-mile pipeline now runs from the Durham County Triangle Wastewater Treatment Plant, near the Durham-Wake county line, into the northwest corner of Wake County. It will provide water to up to 50 customers, including several corporate offices, in western Cary and the Wake portion of Research Triangle Park.

The reclaimed water is not potable. It will be less expensive for customers and help prevent drinking water from being used to maintain green lawns, officials said.

"It saves our businesses money in their effort to keep as beautiful and attractive as they can be," said Bob Geolas, president of the Research Triangle Foundation, which manages RTP. "It also helps us be good stewards of the environment."

The ceremony was hosted by Delta Products Inc., a green technology manufacturer that will become the first customer to use the reclaimed water.

With the lower rates for reclaimed water, the company expects to cut its water bill in half, said Mike Carson, vice president of sales regional manager for Delta.

"The year-long severe drought opened my eyes to the reality of water scarcity," Carson said. "Delta takes water and energy conservation very seriously."

The second phase, slated for completion in 2013, will add an additional 3.2 miles of pipeline and bring reclaimed water to more of western Cary, including the USA Baseball National Training Complex.

The entire project will cost an estimated \$13.8 million, shared by Wake and Durham counties and the Town of Cary. The amount includes \$3 million from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The effort reflects the strength of public-private partnerships in the Triangle, said U.S. Rep. David Price, a Democrat from Chapel Hill. Citizens and local governments acknowledge the growing population in the area and the strain it creates for the local water supply, Price said.

"We can all appreciate the forward thinking region we live in," he said. "This is the greatest (water reclamation) achievement yet in this area."

Utilities in Raleigh, Holly Springs, Johnston County and Orange County also make use of treated wastewater.

The Durham wastewater treatment plant received a major upgrade in 2005, allowing it to process up to 12 million gallons of water daily and meet higher standards of water quality, said Glen Whisler, a Durham county engineer. The new pipeline will carry 500,000 gallons of treated water a day from the plant.

The project is an example of the federal government, through "well-directed" earmarks, helping to provide seed money for local governments to conserve natural resources, Price said. The Republican leadership in the House of Representatives has severely cut funding for EPA grant programs, which may jeopardize future water reclamation projects.

Representatives for two North Carolina Republicans, Sen. Richard Burr and U.S. Rep. Renee Ellmers of Dunn, both praised the project at Tuesday's event.

Ellmers, in a written statement, said that funding for the EPA decreased due to the sluggish economy. She also said that while the EPA does support some important projects like this one, she still thinks the agency wastes money.

"Federal grant programs have outgrown their original intent and resulted in mission creep by the EPA, which has continued to overstep its bounds," she said.